

The Comma (*Polygonia c-album*) apparently feeding on Honey-dew.

This butterfly cannot be classed as a common species in my own neighbourhood, so it is always a pleasure to watch one when it turns up.

Such was the case on Saturday, 8th September 1990, here in the local country park, a warm day with prolonged sunshine interspersed with very short periods of cloud cover. Walking along one of the bridle paths at approximately 13.30 I saw a Comma perched on one of the oak leaves a few yards ahead of me and a couple of inches below my eye level. This had its wings fully open with the tips in contact with the leaf surface. I very carefully approached to within twelve to fourteen inches and was surprised to see the proboscis fully extended onto the leaf surface and being manoeuvred into different positions as though it were imbibing the thin film of honey-dew on the leaf. After a couple of minutes it flew up to another leaf a few feet away but remained on this for only a few seconds before coming back down to another close to the original leaf, where it again resumed the probing activity described earlier.

I observed this Comma at close quarters for a full five minutes and gained the distinct impression that it was actually feeding on the honey-dew. A possible contributory factor to this unusual behaviour by this species, may have been the fact that there was virtually no other source of nectar left within the confines of the park at this date, save for a few desultory-looking flowerheads of thistles, though even these were completely devoid of any type of "nectar-seeking" insects.—A.S. BOOT, 38 Balmoral Road, Colwick, Nottingham NG4 2GD.

Worth a dig

Much has happened to *Lithophane leautieri hesperica* Bours. since the mid-fifties when the late Dr H.B.D. Kettlewell and the late Robin Mere wrote of their exploits in the Isle of Wight with the then termed *L. lapidea* (Hübner.). The moth's subsequent dramatic spread is well chronicled in MBGBI Vol. 10 but when, in 1959, Ron Parfitt and I recorded the first Dorset specimens (*Ent. Gaz.* 11: 15-17) little did we realise that thirty years later we would have the moth commonly at light in our respective gardens in Hampshire and Berkshire.

Although many lepidopterists must by now have bred *leautieri* ab. ova the only note that I have found referring to the cocoon in the wild is Haggett's 1968 paper (*Proc. Brit. ent. nat. Hist. Soc.* 1 (2): 73-76). Haggett, who refers to Wightman's belief that the cocoon was spun on the tree, also cites the finding by Goater and Lorimer of a cocoon with an empty pupa on the bark of a cypress.

This seemed an invitation to do some fieldwork, particularly so, as MBGBI points out, casualties may be high if the cocoons in which the larvae rest for several months before pupating are kept too damp.

A tall isolated *Cupressus macrocarpa* on the roadside half a mile from

home had long looked inviting and, though rather under the public gaze, seemed worth a try. On 19th September I sought permission from a nearby resident, then dug steadily round the trunk. The ground was very dry and the earth came up in small nodules, one of which looked rather cocoon-like. It was well covered with tiny soil particles though flexible to the touch and required gentle, but firm, tearing to open it. An old, but well preserved, pupa was inside. The end result from this one tree was four old cocoons and two fresh ones — all were a few inches down in the soil and could have easily been overlooked among the soil nodules.

On 26th September I tried in the opposite direction and, with the permission of the vicar, dug round two *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* growing in his churchyard. The ground was much harder than at the *macrocarpa* site but an old cocoon was soon unearthed. Shortly afterwards a fresh pupa was exposed with no sign of a cocoon, but by feeling carefully round the base of the trunk one was found attached to the wood. I had inadvertently sliced its end off and in so doing had ejected the pupa. Thus forewarned I continued digging round the trunk, taking care every few inches to feel against the wood. Two more cocoons were found so attached and these had coatings of small pieces of dead *Chamaecyparis* foliage as well as soil particles. From these two trees came five full and three empty cocoons. From both sites all cocoons were similarly shaped — a regular ovoid measuring c.25mm x 15mm. The first moth emerged at 8.25 pm on 30th September and took fifty minutes from the time of eclosion to the lowering of its wings.

I will be recounting nothing new to those who have already tried this exercise but for others who may still require one or two bred *leautieri* without having to wait too long for results, a dig could prove worthwhile.

(For those not requiring the moth, a dig in the winter months would still reveal old cocoons in situ and recording these against named tree species might produce evidence of foodplants so far unrecorded in this country. I suggest that anyone trying this line of investigation should, unless they are very experienced horticulturalists, seek the help of a tree specialist. Mine was invaluable when explaining *Cupressus*, *Chamaecyparis* and their hybrid genus *Cupressocyparis* — but even she shied at tackling the cultivars!)

On 8th October I tried another tack and, furnished with a permit from BBONT, investigated *Juniperus communis* L. on the Berkshire Downs. In the morning results were nil, so finding a clearing among the junipers I had a break. For company there was a party of busy long-tailed tits and then an unexpected weasel who rushed here and there under the bushes. As I walked back down the slope to recommence digging, a microlite aircraft flew over very low and the pilot waved as if in encouragement. But the afternoon produced very little — two *Carabus violaceus* L. and just one lepidopterous pupa which was adorned with long filaments of *Cordyceps*. Even so one's hopes were raised, but there was no sign of a cocoon and the

cremaster was wrong for *leautieri*. Digging around juniper, as those who have tried will know, is very different from working textbook *macrocarpa*. Most of the bushes need to be crawled under and the acicular leaves have a great tendency to go down the back of the neck. Then, as the hours go by, one remembers that the Berkshire Downs are noted for their abundance of soil nodules (every one of which mimics a *leautieri* cocoon) and you resolve to try another day. Nevertheless, the larva *has* been found on a garden *Juniperus* (David Agassiz in MBGBI) and, perhaps most encouraging, it *was* in this isolated spot that David Young took one *leautieri* on 17th October 1986. I like to believe that it wasn't the only one to fly in this quiet valley.— B.R. BAKER, 25 Matlock Road, Caversham, Reading RG4 7BP.

Rothamsted Farmland light trap network: interesting Lepidoptera records for June, 1990.

As stated by Woiwod, Riley and Townsend (*Ent. Rec.* **102**: 200-201), notes of unusual Lepidoptera records from the farmland light trap network on the Rothamsted Estate in Hertfordshire will be published in this journal at regular intervals. The following are noteworthy observations for June 1990:

Advanced flight periods were less evident during June as the effects of the warm spring were partially counteracted by relatively cooler weather. However, *Idaea seriata* Schr., *I. dimidiata* Hufn., *Cosmia trapezina* Linn. and *Mythimna ferrago* Fabr. were all caught about a fortnight before the expected emergence (Skinner, B. (1984) *Colour Identification Guide to Moths of the British Isles*. Viking, Harmondsworth).

A dark form of *Calliteara pudibunda* Linn. conforming to ab. *concolor* Stgr was caught on the 15th June and had not previously been recorded from Harpenden. A further first record for the area was *Idaea vulpinaria* H.-S., one of which was caught on the 29th. A single individual of *Gastropacha quercifolia* Linn. was recorded on the 18th. This species was trapped frequently on the Rothamsted Estate during the 1930s and '40s but had not been seen since 1949.

Several assumed migrants were caught, including small numbers of *Udea ferrugalis* Hb. and one *Phlyctaenia perlucidalis* Hb. The latter is usually associated with fenland in Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire and coastal localities on the east coast between Yorkshire and Kent (Goater, B. (1986) *British Pupalid Moths*. Harley, Colchester). The Harpenden specimen was trapped on the 24th and further singletons were caught in the Rothamsted Insect Survey light traps at Lydd, Kent (Site No. 462, OS grid ref. 044 203) on 22nd June and Cockayne Hatley, Bedfordshire (Site No. 336, OS grid ref. TL 253 494) on 11th July.

Thanks are extended to A. Heath for operating the trap at Lydd.— MARTIN C. TOWNSEND and ADRIAN M. RILEY, Dept. Entomology and Nematology, AFRC Inst. Arable Crops Res., Rothamsted Exp. Stn., Harpenden, Herts AL5 2JQ.